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## Reviews

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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### Abstract

*J.R.R. Tolkien - Myth, Morality and Religion.* Richard L. Purtill. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

*Love All / Busman's Honeymoon.* Dorothy L. Sayers and Muriel St. Clare Byrne. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

*The Terminator.* Direc. by James Cameron. Reviewed by Benjamin Urrutia.

*Fantasists on Fantasy.* Robert H. Boyer and Kenneth J. Zahorski. Reviewed by Mabel Drew.

# REVIEWS

## A Dedication Appreciated

Richard L. Purtill, J.R.R. Tolkien — Myth, Morality and Religion (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 154 pp.

Dedicated to the Mythopoeic Society, this extremely appealing and remarkably useful book truly addresses itself to the topics of its sub-title. We hear (thank goodness) almost nothing of linguistics. It is no mere rehearsal of Tolkien's literary career. And the writer does not think he must condemn C.S. Lewis (or anybody else) in order to praise Tolkien. Rather, taking Tolkien's own statements—his classic "On Fairy Stories" and a careful reading of the Letters—seriously, Purtill has addressed a number of major significances and minor problems in the author's works.

I was especially delighted by the chapter entitled "Tolkien's Creation Myth," which goes a long way toward resolving one's anxiety about Tolkien's intentions and orthodoxy in the first two books of The Silmarillion (the Ainulindalë and the Valaquenta). Indeed, the whole tenor of Purtill's argument is that Tolkien writes as a Christian, to a Christian end. This has always struck me as by far the most useful method of approaching Tolkien.

"Leaf by Niggle," The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings, and The Silmarillion are works that are discussed. The role of myth in human thought and as a basis of literature, the matter of heroism, the identity of hobbits and elves (they are, as Tolkien says, the two sides of human nature), miracle and free will, and the importance of the eucatastrophe as the basis of "consolation"—these topics are given close and illuminating attention.

This book could take a prize as one of the sanest works on Tolkien in some time: it is balanced, nourishing, and wise. As one of the "members of The Mythopoeic Society" to whom it is dedicated, I offer Richard Purtill my heartfelt thanks!

Nancy-Lou Patterson

## Lovers & Honeymooners

Dorothy L. Sayers, Love All, together with Dorothy L. Sayers and Muriel St. Clare Byrne, Busman's Honeymoon (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1984), Introduction by Alzina Stone Dale, 226 pp.

Love All and Busman's Honeymoon should be a cause for rejoicing to every Dorothy L. Sayers reader, fan, scholar, and devotee. It represents that most delightful of all opportunities, a chance to read for the first time a never-before-published work by a favorite author.

Busman's Honeymoon is the play written by Sayers and her best friend and sister Oxonian, Muriel St. Clare Byrne, whose masterwork, The Lisle Letters, was itself but recently published in 1981. By the time the play (written in the spring of 1935) was performed in December of 1936, Sayers had completed rewriting it as a novel. The novelized Busman's Honeymoon is subtitled "A Love Story with Detective Interruptions," a feature which has caused the derision of some critics and the delight of others. The same subtitle could not be used of the play. On the stage, despite a strong scene detailing the confrontation of husband and wife over the conflict of marriage vows and professional vocation, it is emphatically a detective story.

As Alzina Stone Dale says in her excellent, helpful, and wise Introduction, Busman's Honeymoon as a play, though successful in its day, now seems dated and is marred for today's reader by its class distinctions. These are given the blindest possible emphasis in a newly found and published set of character descriptions printed in the Appendices of this book. In many ways these notes are delicious to contemplate, especially for the kind of reader (of whom I am one) who would like to visit the very place where Lord Peter proposed to Harriet. But even such a besotted reader as I am cannot overlook the grating elements of class distinction. Sayers says of Crutchley, "of all the people in the play, he is the only one who resents Peter's native authority," while remarking of Lord Peter that "the villagers...recognize him at once as a hereditary ruler." The hour has gone when anybody could read that without flinching, as Dale does (the novel presents the same idea by demonstration rather than iteration, and hence softens the effect). Dale does not remark on the equally grating element of Jewish stereotyping which is much stronger in the play itself as well as in the character description of "Mr. MacBride" than it is in the novel. What are we to make of Sayers's stage direction that on reporting this name, Bunter sketches a "Hebraic gesture?"

One assumes that this gesture was the time-honoured but morally repulsive one of drawing the profile of a large hooked nose before one's face in the air, which has, as I understand it, been enshrined as the signed form for "a Jew" used by the hearing-impaired. God forgive us all! The time has passed when the deaf or the Jews can be regarded as intrinsically funny. The character of MacBride is in fact rather charmingly drawn and one doesn't doubt the realism with which Sayers has limed her stereotypic moneylender as a young man "in no way unpleasant or unkindly in himself." Sayers probably thought that she was defending what she regarded as a characteristic Jewish virtue of family loyalty, and gives the play a scene not used in the novel, in which MacBride and Lord Peter engage in a delicate "passage of arms" (as Sayers calls it in her stage directions) over the matter and

MacBride is allowed to represent his imputed point of view "with dignity." Sayers would have said that she used stereotypes and stock responses for all her minor characters (as indeed she did) because it was, after all, a popular entertainment. But one's teeth grate on it, all the same.

For the most part, however, Busman's Honeymoon would be a delight to perform and to see even today. I would love to be part of an amateur production of it; it is a delightful period-piece. The novel is something more considerable and more lasting, in my opinion, saying something extremely important about human relationships, and forms with Gaudy Night a pair of works of major social significance in the history of letters as well as of feminine self-identification.

This latter theme is the reason why Love All—published here for the very first time (its brief run in 1940 cut short by the Nazi invasion of Norway)—may have been scamped in previous reports. It is a very funny piece of feminist writing in which Sayers with deft and deadly aim bursts the bubbleheaded idea that only a man can place his own work at the centre of his life. In the play, a male novelist attempts to make himself the centre of life for three women—his wife, his mistress, and his secretary. In the end, all three desert him to follow their own destinies, which he has attempted to deny. The play is as airy as cotton candy and as acid as lemon meringue, but there is a little walloping of strychnine lurking in the sweetness. The novelist is left to mutter "Damn!" and fling his champagne glass into the wings: of all the candidates for a portrait of Sayers's husband, Major Atherton Fleming, Godfrey Daybrook may be the best.

We can also note the presence in the play of substantial passages written in Italian to be spoken offstage by gondoliers who shout beneath the windows of the Venetian apartment where the play opens. Sayers had visited Venice twice in 1937. In 1944 she was to read—for the first time—Dante's Commedia in an edition containing both Italian and English. Maybe the seed of Sayers's greatest scholarly work, her translation of The Divine Comedy, is to be found in the writing of her



charming but neglected play, Love All. In any event it is a pleasure to be able to read this work, for me the last—so far—unread work in her published canon. I look forward longingly to the great day when her unfinished detective novel, Thrones, Dominations, autobiographical My Edwardian Childhood and fictionalized autobiography, Cat o' Nary, finally appear in print!

Nancy-Lou Patterson

## Heroic Parallels

The Terminator. Starring Arnold Schwarzenegger in the title role, Linda Hamilton as Sarah Connor, Michael Biehn as Kyle Reese, and Paul Winfield as Lieutenant Traxler. Written by James Cameron with Gale Ann Hurd. Directed by James Cameron. An Orion Pictures release.

The plot of this film seems to be derived more or less from the symbolic story told in Revelation (Apocalypse) 12:2-6: "And she being with child cried, travelling in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered: for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God and his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her 1260 days."

The only major departure from this basic story line is that the Dragon, here identified with the Machine (an identification whereof J.R.R. Tolkien would enthusiastically approve) does not wait until the man child is born, but seeks to destroy the woman before he that will crush its head comes into the world. And so Mr. S. very convincingly (he is so dire and threatening, he makes Darth Vader look like Michael Jackson) portrays a very rough mechanical beast, slouching towards Bethlehem (here Los Angeles, "The Angels") to prevent the Birth.

But though it gets top billing, the Terminator is not the main character here. Sarah Connor is, and not just as the mother of a future Hero, but also as quite an admirable woman in her own right. She is a very Tolkienian sort of hero, as she is suddenly thrust, like Bilbo and Frodo, completely against her will, out of her ordinary and comfortable life and home into a distressing and horrifying adventure, but grows (convincingly and believably) to fill the great expectations Kyle Reese has of her.

In that respect, Reese fills a Gandalfian function, but he is much more like Aragorn—especially in those aspects described by John Houghton in "Rochester the Renower: The Byronic Hero and the Messiah as Elements in The King Ellessar." (Mythlore 39). He certainly has all the characteristics of the Byronic hero: superhuman capability (both for suffering and for fighting), secret burden, enormous self-control, contempt for rules, and an utter lack of respectability. The last one is very obvious in the scene, in a present-day "Prancing Pony", where Sarah first meets Kyle. So disreputable and ruffianly he looks (unshaven, clad in stinking stolen garb) that she

suspects him of being the madman who is murdering everybody named Sarah Connor, never dreaming that he is her appointed protector. "He was despised and rejected of men; an man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him. He was despised, and we esteemed him as not... we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." (Isaiah 53:3-4). Everybody thought he was crazy, in other words. The authorities and experts automatically assume that Kyle is schizophrenic, never suspecting for a second that he is telling the Gospel truth. "Again, the Byronic trait..." as John Houghton says, "brings us directly to the messianic parallel." This is as true of Reese as of Aragorn-Strider.

The parallels between the two are several. Of both one may say the following: He has been assigned to guide and protect a reluctant homebody of a protagonist, whom he first meets in a crowded tavern and who is at first frightened by the hero's ruffianly appearance. However, the Byronic-Messianic hero saves the protagonist from a dangerous foe. Given these similarities, it seems to me that J.R.R. Tolkien has been an influence on Cameron and Hurd.

Benjamin Urrutia

## A Fantasy on Fantasy

Robert H. Boyer and Kenneth J. Zahorski, Fantasists on Fantasy (New York, NY: Avon/Discus, 1984), 287 pp.

[Review Editor's Note: This volume contains four works of direct interest to Mythlore readers: George MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination;" J.R.R. Tolkien, excerpt from "On Fairy-Stories;" J.R.R. Tolkien, "To W.H. Auden," from The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien; and C.S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said." The reviewer is an Ontario newspaper columnist. I would like to thank Holley Wilkinson for suggesting that this book be reviewed. N-L-P.]

Fantasy in a literary sense has always been for me a word indicating happy experiences in a country where the laughter of children is heard, and on whose borders wisful adults stand, prevented from entering only by their own dull maturity. Some of the authors who appear in the pages of Fantasists on Fantasy seem to prove me wrong. Their contention is that fantasists compose directly from mental images; unself-consciously, uninfluenced by concern for potential readers. A mysterious fountain gushes forth in the creative mind and where it flows from there is a matter of chance. Some children are intrigued by the fantastic reflections in the moving stream but as I read these essays and remember other works by their authors I must conclude that fantasy, fairy-tales, folk-lore fiction, appeal more to maturity than to youth.

The fantasists included in this book write no more for children than they do for anyone else, in the sense that they have a specific contingent of readers for targets. Ultimately they anticipate a readership but of whom it will consist concerns them not at all. Even George MacDonald, whose story The Princess and the Goblin is beloved by children everywhere, stated "For my part I do not write for children, but for the child-like, whether of five or fifty or seventy-five." Most of our writers under discussion claim that the fantasy world is there; Middle-earth, Perelandra, the



Hobbits and the elves and Tolkien's Ents. There is Lord Dunsany's Elfland and Lloyd Alexander's Prydain. They aren't birthed and developed in the imagination. They already exist and our fantasists write about them as they explore. Ursula K. LeGuin replied to the question "But how did you plan the Earthsea world, how did you develop the languages?" "I didn't plan anything, I found it-- in my subconscious."

That these unearthly worlds are discovered rather than invented is further attested to by C.S. Lewis who happened to see one day, a faun carrying an umbrella, and a queen on a sledge. What he did with them was Lewis's personal decision. The point is that he found them. They existed in their own right. Sir Hubert Read offers that fantasy is objective rather than imaginative. And Susan Cooper is abruptly confronted by the images of fantasy in her subconscious. "When working on a book which turns out to be a fantasy novel, I exist in a state of continual astonishment." It is a "trusting step into the unknown... I know where I'm going... but I have no real idea of what I shall find on the way... I am striking out into a strange land, listening for the music that will tell me which way to go."

We read in essays by August Derleth and H.P. Lovecraft that myth and legend are sources drawn on in fantasy literature, while LeGuin stresses the dream and subconscious roots. Lord Dunsany was inspired by mythological elements in European culture to produce tales that glow more with beauty than glower with Gothic terror, but both qualities are fantasy components. Derleth offers W.H. Hudson's Green Mansions as an illustration of the beauty that sometimes shines in such writings while terror predominates in the works of Lovecraft.

My favorite in this collection of fantasy writers; the one whom I identify as first and foremost in their ranks, is George MacDonald. While those later authors deny responsibility for the embryo of their fictional worlds and the inhabitants, (assumedly they were found

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Tolkien's use of historical languages and in the dialogue between the characters themselves. In Tolkien's fantasy works, then, language not only becomes an outward manifestation of a character's nature, but also a cultural marker. There are several techniques which J.R.R. Tolkien used to develop the cultural history and personality for each of his races and individual characters through the outward manifestations of language, both spoken and written. All of them spring from his linguistic aesthetic, his sense for philological sound and form.

### Notes

[1] Edmund Wilson, "Oo, Those Awful Orcs!", The Nation, 182 (April 14, 1956), p.312

[2] Philip Norman, "The Prevalence of Hobbits," New York Times Magazine (Jan. 15, 1967), 30-31, 97, 100, 102.

[3] Letters, p.439, "While on holiday with his family at Lamora Cove in Cornwall in 1932, Tolkien amused the children by giving the nickname 'Gaffer Gamage' to a local 'character'; 347-8, "It started with a holiday about thirty years ago at Lamora Cove (then wild and fairly inaccessible). There was a curious local character, an old man who used to go about swapping gossip and weather wisdom and such like. To amuse my boys I named him Gaffer Gamage, and the name became part of the family lore to fix on old chaps of the kind."

[4] Wilson, op. cit., p.312.

[5] R. J. Reilly, "Tolkien and the Fairy Story," Thought, Vol. 38 (Spring, 1963), p. 96.

[6] W. R. Irwin, "There and Back Again," Sewanee Review Vol. 69 (October-December, 1961), p. 572.

[7] Ruth S. Noel, The Mythology of Middle Earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), p. 28.

[8] Neil D. Isaacs and Zimbardo, Rose A, eds., Tolkien and the Critics (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 50-1.

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in some Victorian cabbage-patch), MacDonald refers to "the world once-invented" and how one must go on from there to develop the story line, always within a lawful, literally moral, perimeter. I think this contradiction is a matter of terminology. George MacDonald's world in the Scottish hills and dark, mysterious mine tunnels, was a landscape already implanted in his own unique subconscious as though by immaculate conception. The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie blossomed into two of the loveliest of fairy tales. Although they have a different flavor from the works of later fantasists, who wander more widely in myth and legend, MacDonald has been referred to as "the father of modern fantasy." Poet as well, and myth-maker, his fairy stories are of a nature and style that appeal most of all to children.

James Thurber with his wry wit and perceptive satire is a favorite of mine but I hadn't expected to find him writing fantasy nor did I know him as a fantasist. In fact, he has written a number of fairy tales; The Thirteen Clocks, The Wonderful O, and

several others. Humor can belong as legitimately to fantasy as do horror, magic, dreams. Every area of literature has a place there as long as it observes the accepted rules. Thurber has expressed his belief that L. Frank Baum's The Wizard of Oz did qualify as fantasy though there are some in this collection of critical and reflective essays who disagree. Michael Moorcock in his essay "Wit and Humour, in Fantasy," declares that "fantastic fiction is happily very rich in humour." Thurber's second piece, "Tempest in a Looking Glass," is an attack on the psychoanalytic view of the fairy tale, specifically the ridiculous charges leveled at Alice in Wonderland by Dr. Paul Schilder, research professor of psychiatry at New York University. He found this utterly charming, imaginative work by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson full of "cruelty, fear, and sadistic trends of cannibalism!"

Besides those authors mentioned above we find Andre Norton with "On Writing Fantasy," while Katherine Kurtz continues to charm the child-like curiosity with her Celtic-English, The Chronicles of the Deryni. Felix Marti-Ibaniz and Mollie Hunter believe that fantasy, though most appreciated for its sheer magical entertainment, is also beneficial to young readers, actually helping them to adjust to a harsh world from which they may want to withdraw. That familiar, happy, eccentric character, G.K. Chesterton, tells us that fairyland, though lovely and infinitely desirable, is not a place where one can throw aside all discretion and do as one likes. It is a highly moral country where goodness is rewarded only if all the conditions are met. "The whole happiness of fairyland hangs upon one thread." There is one door that Bluebeard's wife must not open. "A promise is broken to a cat and the whole world goes wrong." In his essay, "Tolkien's Magic Ring," Peter Beagle praises the credibility and purity and poetry of that widely known fantasist.

Fantasy in mythological stories and science fiction has become more popular in this century where the classical fairy tale once predominated. Not every reader is drawn to fantasy. It takes a certain kind of imagination; the kind that looks inward and backward to the unconscious mind and ancestral archetypes. We escape "into ourselves," as Susan Cooper puts it. While Jane Langton in her essay "The Weak Place in the Cloth," observes that the fantasy lover is, like Dr. Seuss's foolish king who wanted something new to come out of the sky, "something different than the ordinary sunshine, rain, and snow."

Although all of us seek at times to escape from the worries or the grey monotony of everyday life, the reader of fantasy is drawn to an impossible world that resembles the real so strongly yet so subtly, he is completely smitten. He hears and heeds the echoes of Pan's pipes floating over the wind in the willows, or he stumbles with eager curiosity over the borders of Lilliput. Alice's deliciously contrary Wonderland entices him beyond resistance, or he soars on magic wings in the Land of Oz in the same real way that one floats in a dream.

I found, as I believe will every lover of the fairy tale, that the book Fantasists on Fantasy is a fantasy in itself. Readers, like wine-tasters utterly absorbed in the tasting experience, will savor with profound, sensuous appreciation, each of these essays by those who commute to the land of faery and choose to tell us of its wonders.

Mabel Drew